

## **WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS) – FACTS FOR BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Why should businesses and organizations be concerned about pertussis?**

Whooping cough (pertussis) can cause a long-lasting cough illness in children and adults. Infants are at highest risk for hospitalization and death, but all ages can suffer complications. That's why it's important to prevent pertussis both in babies and in people who have contact with babies. This includes pregnant women, household members, health care providers, child care providers, and others who take care of babies. If your clients or workers have close contact with infants or pregnant women, take extra care to prevent the spread of pertussis.

### **What do we do if someone in the workplace is sick with a cough?**

Follow your usual policies for keeping ill people from coming to work. Everyone should cover their coughs and wash their hands frequently. Many different infections can cause a cough. Only a health care provider can diagnose and treat pertussis. A coughing worker should see a doctor for possible pertussis if:

- The cough has lasted two or more weeks, *or*
- The cough has lasted one or more weeks and occurs with coughing fits, vomiting, or difficulty catching a breath, cough worse at night *or*
- The coworker:
  - Is a pregnant woman, *or*
  - Has close contact with infants and pregnant women, *or*
  - Has had close contact with someone with pertussis

In the meantime, the worker with possible pertussis should keep at least 3 to 6 feet away from others, especially from infants and pregnant women.

### **What do we do if a doctor says someone in the workplace has pertussis?**

The standard recommendation to keep pertussis from spreading to others in the workplace is to require people with pertussis to stay home while contagious. An infected person is contagious until one of these 3 conditions has been met: 1) five days of appropriate antibiotic treatment for pertussis has been finished, *or* 2) three weeks have passed since the cough started, *or* 3) the cough is completely gone. If it is not possible to implement this recommendation, people with pertussis should avoid close contact (3 to 6 feet) with others while contagious. This is especially important if staff or clients include infants or pregnant women. People with pertussis should also cover coughs, wash hands frequently, and avoid sharing common objects or surfaces with others.

### **What can we do to protect our business or organization from whooping cough?**

Vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others from whooping cough. The whooping cough vaccine for adults is called Tdap. All teens and adults who have not received a dose of Tdap vaccine should get one as soon as possible. Whooping cough vaccine is available through many health care providers and pharmacies. Also, protect yourself and others by staying home from work when ill, avoiding close contact with ill persons and washing hands frequently. These steps can also help prevent other respiratory infections such as influenza.

For more information, visit [kingcounty.gov/health/pertussis](http://kingcounty.gov/health/pertussis)